

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION V

DATE: MAR 21 1985

US EPA RECORDS CENTER REGION 5



484362

SUBJECT: Cyanide Incident, City of Chicago
Delivery Order #6894-05-018

FROM: *Stephen M. Browning*
Stephen M. Browning, On-Scene Coordinator
Western Response Unit

TO: Robert J. Bowden, Chief
Western Response Unit

BACKGROUND

On July 24, 1984, the Chicago Bomb and Arson Squad informed the Emergency Response Section of U.S. EPA, Region V, that a bag labeled "Hazardous Substances" had been stored in the Police Department's Evidence and Recovery Room, located at 2642 South California, Chicago, Illinois. Further, they added that neither the Illinois EPA nor the Chicago Fire Department's Hazardous Substance Branch were able to respond to this incident.

Unit Chief, Robert Bowden, tasked the Technical Assistance Team (TAT) for emergency response removals to investigate this incident and ascertain if an imminent and substantial hazard existed contra the public health, the environment, or both.

The TAT arrived on site and met with Lieutenant Joe Shields, Shift Supervisor, at the recovery room. Lieutenant Shields explained that a bag labeled "Hazardous Substance" was stored in the recovery room and had been there since July 3, 1984, when a private citizen had notified the Bomb Squad of the "suspicious but unknown contents" bag in his garage. The TAT, attired in Level C protection including full face respirators, entered the room with field detection equipment (draeger tube and pump), attempted to characterize ambient conditions. However, these attempts proved uneventful. TAT approached the bag on the floor and opened it. They observed a long cylindrically-shaped can with tubing and manual pump, along with several glass jars. Reusing the draeger pump and fresh tubes, they confirmed cyanide present with a concentration higher than 20 ppm. As a reference, an employee should not be exposed to cyanides at a concentration, on an 8-hour time weighted basis, exceeding 5 ppm.

Because of their findings, TAT notified team leader, Kurt Stimpson, who immediately notified U.S. EPA Emergency Response Section Chief, Robert Bowden, of these results. Mr. Bowden notified the Regional Administrator of this hazardous incident and received oral authorization to activate the Emergency Response Clean-up Services (ERCS) network and to obligate \$1,500 to mitigate the hazardous incident.

This writer was assigned the project and informed of the incident, location, and whom the ERCS subcontractor would be. Responding to the incident, this On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) commuted to the south-California Avenue location and met with Chicago Police, TAT, and ERCS personnel. After a short briefing, a transfer of ownership from the Chicago Police Department, via the U.S. EPA, ultimately to the subcontractor, occurred. Arrangements were made via this writer for interim storage at Mid-America Environment Services' Riverdale facility, while chemical analysis was performed on the material.

In interim, while analysis was outstanding, an immediate action memorandum was drafted. On July 31, 1984, the Regional Administrator approved the action memo and authorized a \$500 expenditure for mitigation of this incident.

ANALYTICAL RESULTS

After transfer of possession from police officials to the OSC, the ERCS subcontractor arranged for Gulf Coast Laboratories, Incorporated, located in Park Forest South, Illinois, to chemically analyze the material and quantify the total concentration of cyanides present. Analysis indicated that total cyanides present in the material approximated 85 ppm. It was equivalent to de-con, a generic pesticide.

DISPOSITION

Based upon analytical results, I arranged for the ERCS subcontractor to dispose of this pesticide by conventional means. It was discarded into a garbage pail. Any other means of disposal would have been time consuming and not cost efficient. Total project costs were \$494 and included \$25 for chemical analysis of the material.